



DENTAL SEALANTS

Brushing and flossing are the best ways to help prevent cavities, but it is not always easy to clean every nook and cranny of your teeth – especially your back teeth, called molars. They are rough, uneven, and a favorite place for leftover food and cavity-causing bacteria to hide. Sealants help keep those teeth clean. A dental sealant is a thin, protective coating (made from plastic or other dental materials) that adheres to the chewing surface of your back teeth. There is no substitute for brushing and flossing, but sealants can keep cavities from forming and may even stop early stages of decay from becoming a full-blown cavity.

Sealants have been shown to reduce the risk of decay by nearly 80 percent in molars. This is especially important when it comes to your child's dental health. "School-age children without sealants have almost three times more cavities than children with sealants,"¹ according to an October 2016 report published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The report revealed that only 43 percent of children ages 6 to 11 have dental sealants.

How do sealants work?

Think of them as raincoats for your teeth. When the cavity-causing bacteria that live in everyone's mouths meet leftover food particles, they produce acids that can create holes in teeth called cavities. After sealant is applied, it keeps those bits of food out and stops bacteria and acid from settling on your teeth, just like a raincoat keeps you clean and dry during a storm.

Who can get sealants?

Children and adults can benefit from sealants, but the earlier you get them, the better. Your first molars appear around age 6, and second molars break through around age 12. Sealing these teeth as soon as they come through can keep them cavity-free from the start, which helps save time and money in the long run. Ask your dentist if sealants are a good option for you and your family.



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

How are sealants applied?

It is a quick and painless process. Your dentist will clean and dry your tooth before placing an acidic gel on your teeth. This gel roughs up your tooth surface so a strong bond will form between your tooth and the sealant. After a few seconds, your dentist will rinse off the gel and dry your tooth before applying the sealant onto the grooves of your tooth. Your dentist will then use a special blue light to harden the sealant.

Can sealants be placed over cavities?

Sealants can be used over areas of early decay to prevent further damage to your tooth. Because some sealants are clear, your dentist can keep an eye on the tooth to make sure the sealant is doing its job.

Are there any side effects?

Apart from an allergy that may exist, there are no known side effects from sealants.

How long do sealants last?

Sealants will often last for several years before they need to be reapplied. During your regular dental visit, your dentist will check the condition of the sealant and can reapply them as needed. Frequent chewing of sticky foods and candies can cause a sealant to be lost early.

24/7 Emergency Contact Number: 1-888-295-5156

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Page 2 of 3



Are sealants covered by dental plans?

Some plans, including Medicaid, cover sealants on eligible teeth. Contact your dental benefit company to find out what kind of coverage you have. If you need assistance applying for dental insurance or finding a dentist, call the Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Services at 302-622-4540.

Do sealants contain the synthetic compound, Bisphenol A (BPA)?

Yes, sealants contain a tiny amount of BPA but not enough to cause you or a loved one any harm. In fact, you get more exposure to BPA by simply touching a receipt, using cosmetics, or contacting dust.

For more information, contact the Division of Public Health, Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Services, at 302-622-4540 and www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsm/ohphome.html.

Resources

1. American Dental Association. 2020. *Sealants*. In Mouth Healthy. Retrieved July 16, 2020 from: <http://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/s/sealants>
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Dental Sealants Prevent Cavities—Vital Signs website. Accessed November 17, 2020 from <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/pdf/2016-10-vitalsigns.pdf>